



Policy Brief

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Security sector reform in the Balkans: a key to ending conflict

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Background

Security Sector Reform (SSR) is a specific peace-building instrument which is part of a much wider process of transformation and stabilisation.

It is crucial for the authorities in post-conflict societies to reform their military (and paramilitary), police, intelligence and border control forces, customs and judiciary to bring about lasting change. Without substantial reforms in these areas, it is almost impossible to achieve sustainable peace, democracy and development.

While this is true for many war-torn communities and states, it is particularly important for the countries of the Western Balkans, plagued as they are by the legacy of wars, strained inter-ethnic relations, unresolved status issues, thriving criminal activities, corrupt bureaucracies and high unemployment rates.

Some countries in the region are also hampered by oversized and underpaid regular forces, parallel informal security networks, scarce capacity or resources to stem

insecurity, a culture of impunity, and a lack of political will to ensure accountability.

While the concept of Security Sector Reform is relatively young, the notion of restructuring national security sectors is not.

The objective of SSR is to achieve a wide-ranging transformation of the whole spectrum of security-related agencies and actors, and to coordinate their activities in line with the principles of good governance and democratic civilian control.

As such, SSR goes well beyond previous efforts, which were mostly piecemeal or targeted at individual sectors, by attempting to reform the entire security apparatus.

The United Nations was the first organisation to link a reduction in military expenditure to development support, in the 1950s. This approach gathered momentum in the 1990s, particularly amongst aid donors, and its scope was extended to cover conflict prevention and post-conflict reconstruction.

The concept of SSR *per se* was launched by the UK Department for International Development in the late 1990s, and thereafter rapidly became a prominent policy well beyond the UK's shores.

It has variously been described as 'justice and SSR' (by the United Nations Development Programme), 'security system reform' or even 'security sector transformation' (by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development).

The Swiss-based Geneva Centre for Democratic Control of the Armed Forces (DCAF) has also contributed to this process by fleshing out the analytical and conceptual meaning of SSR. In addition, key actors have gained crucial experience in the field under the aegis of the UN peace-support operations in Timor Leste and Kosovo, and through the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH).

In December 2003, the European Security Strategy identified SSR as an area where the EU could make a decisive contribution to

global security, as part of its broader conflict prevention strategy to consolidate peace and democracy.

The Union is creating a strategic framework which takes a comprehensive approach to SSR and links it to different EU policy instruments. It currently supports SSR processes in more than 70 countries.

In Europe, both the EU and NATO have played important roles in helping post-communist eastern and central European societies to reform their security apparatus in line with democratic norms. These approaches are now being applied worldwide.

However, after the 'wars of Yugoslav succession' in the 1990s, the reform process has taken significantly different forms in each of the successor Balkan states.

In Slovenia and, to a lesser extent, Macedonia, moves to downsize the security forces and establish parliamentary control did not run into any major difficulties.

But in BiH and Croatia, the implementation of SSR was delayed until after the Dayton Peace Agreement of late 1995, and the reform process did not begin in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) until after the fall of Slobodan Milosevic.

Serbian Prime Minister Zoran Djindjic's courage in tackling the law-enforcement architecture led to his assassination in March 2003. Three years later, there is still considerable opposition to defence and intelligence sector reforms, as demonstrated by the difficulties in arresting indicted war criminals Ratko Mladic and Radovan Karadzic.

In other cases, the challenge has been to reconstruct existing forces, unify fragmented security structures or restore the tarnished reputation of the military and police, and win back the trust of some segments of society.

This is crucial to avoid the impression that some groups are treated less fairly than others. Efficient policing is vital to create a safe environment and establish a functional state, but both BiH and Kosovo are still a long way from achieving this goal.

In many post-conflict situations, the end of overt hostilities is frequently accompanied by a sharp rise in crime, violence and illegal trafficking. This in turn prompts citizens to demand a heavy-handed response, which in itself can create additional obstacles to security sector reform. This has been particularly true in Central America, Afghanistan and, notably, the Balkans.

This problem must be addressed promptly and effectively both

to provide the minimum level of security and legality necessary for local enterprises and workers to operate normally, and to boost the confidence of potential foreign investors. Without this, no reconstruction effort can possibly succeed.

Guiding principles

SSR must be guided by the objective of achieving efficient coordination throughout the security chain. The support given by the international community must also be coordinated.

SSR is a long-term process in which training for security agents is key. This is particularly true for police forces, which must respect human rights and enjoy the trust of their communities. Joint training at the regional level could also play a vital role in building confidence.

It is essential to create a sense of local ownership of the SSR process, so that reforms are not perceived as being imposed from the outside.

The principles of good governance, clear lines of accountability and transparency must govern the process, which has to be subject to democratic and civilian oversight. Transparency helps build confidence and reinforces perceptions that neighbours have shared interests: SSR needs to be reciprocal to help build regional confidence.

State of play

Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia and Montenegro, as well as Kosovo (under United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244) and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) have all benefited from EU support for SSR in the Balkans.

The region faces daunting political, financial, logistical and historical

challenges in reforming the security sector. As this is a long-term process which involves transforming the balance of power within societies, some resistance is inevitable.

In general, SSR is not regarded as a priority by governments in the region, caught as these countries are between acrimony,

which is an inevitable legacy of past conflicts, and a deep-rooted nationalism that places the military on a pedestal and even, at times, makes heroes of indicted war criminals. Furthermore, local security forces are not politically neutral and tend to favour preserving the status quo, particularly as there are not enough incentives to encourage change.

However, the prospect of EU membership is becoming an essential driving force for reform across the entire region and SSR is now one of the key conditions for the Balkan countries to begin accession negotiations, with conflict prevention, border management, police reform (especially in BiH) and reform of intelligence services (especially in Serbia) the over-riding priorities.

This makes rigorous monitoring and evaluation of prospective EU Member States' performance on SSR paramount because, put simply, 'what gets measured gets done'.

Dilemmas

Three major policy dilemmas need to be addressed.

First, the situation on the ground in the Balkans varies enormously from country to country. This means that there cannot be a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to SSR. Plans and benchmarks have to be tailored to fit the circumstances in each country, while maintaining coherent SSR operational guidelines.

Secondly, the respective roles of the police and the military have to be clarified. In BiH, for instance, there is an operational grey area between the police and the military missions on the ground, and this has led to occasional overlaps and clashes.

Similarly, the respective roles of the international and local forces are often unclear. There has been confusion in Albania, BiH, Croatia, FYROM, and Serbia and Montenegro over the roles played by the EU and NATO, compounded by the fact that all these countries are potential candidates for membership of both. While NATO has substantial experience in the SSR domain, the Union's ambitions in this area are growing and it has a broader spectrum of policy tools at its disposal.

Finally, strategic objectives and tactical options may prove difficult to reconcile. To give just one example: slimming down security forces (particularly military forces) and making them more accountable and transparent is a key strategic objective. However, this may face political and bureaucratic resistance (due to vested interests among opponents of change) – and there is a risk that the negative social consequences of such reforms, in the shape of job losses, could further strengthen corruption and other illegal activities.

The EU is accompanying its SSR retraining programmes for soldiers in the Democratic Republic of Congo with guaranteed salaries for those affected by the reforms. It could take a similar approach in the Balkans, by supporting the gradual reintroduction of security officers into civilian life.

When this does not happen and reintegration is delayed, serious problems can arise – as happened in Guatemala in the late 1990s, for example, when the country became a major crossroads for drug trafficking.

Reconstruction

In recent years, the international community has shared the responsibility for addressing major security challenges in both Kosovo and BiH.

The unresolved status of Kosovo clearly hampers economic recovery and institutional development. Security remains precarious and volatile. Minorities are still vulnerable to ethnically-motivated assaults which go unpunished as a result of the ethnic bias of the security forces and judicial structures. Kosovo is also a major hub for organised crime.

Since 1999, the country has been run by the United Nations, with NATO mandated to create a secure environment. The UN Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) police force is

currently responsible for law enforcement, and a Kosovo Police Force (KPS) has been established and is gradually assuming operational responsibilities.

The confusion created by the different policing cultures within UNMIK and the dual loyalties, of local officers to the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) leadership and the UN administration, have hindered substantial progress. A quarter of the demobilised KLA combatants were integrated into the Kosovo Protection Force (KPC), which is now considered as a sort of 'army in waiting'. It is hoped, however, that the 'Internal Security Sector Review' launched by UNMIK in 2005 can pave the way for a more effective and durable transformation.

In post-Dayton BiH, the interpretation of the constitutional arrangements for creating two separate entities (the Bosniak-Croat Federation and the Republika Srpska) resulted in the creation of two separate armies each with their own intelligence services and police. This has led to divisions in other sectors, such as the economy and education, and has hampered reconciliation efforts. Moreover, criminals are capitalising on the fact that they can move from one jurisdiction to another, while the police cannot.

On the positive side, the armed forces in BiH have been downsized and the intelligence sector reformed. The EU has been able to pursue SSR objectives using Community instruments to support institution-building, while the EU Police Mission is supporting police reform. The Union has also been helped by the clout it can wield because of the prospect of eventual accession to the club.

A *de facto* division of labour with NATO has also begun to take shape in all the countries in the region, with the Alliance concentrating on military reform and the Union on border security, judiciary and police reform.

Prospects

Experience has shown that focusing on downsizing security forces and reducing military spending may not always be consistent with the goal of enhancing security and providing a foundation for development.

The disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) process and the various transitional phases in post-conflict reconstruction need to be carefully handled and require a prolonged international presence and long-term assistance.

The recent collapse of law and order in East Timor demonstrates the difficulties inherent in nation- and institution-building, and underlines the need for the SSR process to take full account of its wide-ranging and sensitive domestic political and economic ramifications.

Towards an Eu concept

The European Commission's Communication on 'A Concept for European Community Support for Security Sector Reform', published in May 2006, provides an overview of the EU policies and strategies that are supporting SSR processes in more than 70 countries.

It covers a wide range of policy areas, from development, human rights and democracy to enlargement, European Neighbourhood Policy, conflict prevention, crisis management, and the external dimension of freedom, justice and security.

The Commission is committed to supporting SSR in fragile states, countries in crisis and those engaged in peace-building

efforts. In some cases, it does this in conjunction with European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) missions, enabling the EU to play a more influential role on the ground.

Through the Community Assistance for Reconstruction, Development and Stabilisation (CARDS) programme, the Balkan countries have received substantial SSR support, not only for judicial reform and internal security but also for police and border-management capacity-building.

The EU has assisted local officials who are responsible for internal and external security by improving civilian management bodies, civilian oversight mechanisms and law enforcement.

It has also taken steps to tackle the accumulation and spread of small arms and light weapons, and promoted regional confidence-building measures.

Although SSR in the Balkans is now an integral part of EU enlargement policy, integrating it more clearly into the relevant country strategy papers, with specific roadmaps for implementation and assessment, would be beneficial.

Despite the exponential growth in the attention and resources devoted to SSR, it is still difficult to point to positive and visible results. The full circle of standard-setting, implementation, assessment and feedback needs to be completed and made more effective, especially since security and development in the Balkans are interdependent.

EU actions and ESDP missions on the ground in BiH and FYROM – and soon in Kosovo

as well – should be complementary and need to generate tangible results.

Achieving coherence

An overarching SSR policy spanning the EU's institutional architecture and the entire region would produce a multiplier effect for its various (and still separate) policies. It would also help the Union to coordinate its efforts with those of other international players, starting with the UN and NATO.

The Commission's May 2006 Communication complements the Council's strategy of supporting security sector reform drawn up in November 2005 within the framework of the ESDP.

The conclusions of the June 2006 External Relations Council stress the importance of ensuring a coherent approach across all the Union's institutions in order to provide effective and sustainable support to EU partner countries.

The Union's Political and Security Committee (PSC) is planning to develop a broader EU SSR concept during the forthcoming Finnish Presidency. But, ultimately, the key to success – in the Balkans as much as elsewhere – is strong national ownership of SSR, coupled with accountability and transparency, and, as in any other war-torn community, instilling democratic values throughout security structures.

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